

# Birds in New Mexico



## **Spotted Towhee** - The Spotted

Towhee is a large, striking sparrow of sun-baked thickets of the West. When you catch sight of one, they're gleaming black above (females are grayish), spotted and striped with brilliant white. Their warm rufous flanks match the dry leaves they spend their time hopping around in. The birds can be hard to see in the leaf litter, so your best chance for an unobstructed look at this handsome bird may be in the spring, when males climb into the shrub tops to sing their buzzy

songs.

- [one in the backyard of Stalgren Ct in late January 2018, scratching around with two feet in the pot with soil]. Watch a Spotted Towhee feeding on the ground; you'll probably observe its two-footed, backwards-scratching hop. This "double-scratching" is used by a number of towhee and sparrow species to uncover the seeds and small invertebrates they feed on. One Spotted Towhee with an unusable, injured foot was observed hopping and scratching with one foot.
  - The Spotted Towhee and the very similar Eastern Towhee used to be considered the same species, the **Rufous-sided Towhee**. The two forms still occur together in the Great Plains, where they sometimes interbreed. This is a common evolutionary pattern in North American birds – a holdover from when the great ice sheets split the continent down the middle, isolating birds into eastern and western populations that eventually became new species.